

All about Marine Mammals

Read the passage below.

As we already know, mammals are animals that have lungs and breathe air. They also are warm-blooded which means that they can keep warm even when it is cold outside. Fish and reptiles are different from mammals as they are cold-blooded. This means they get cold when it gets cold outside. These creatures lay **dormant** in the winter months. Unlike these creatures hatched from eggs, mammals are born alive and drink their mothers' milk. Hair will be found on all mammals at some point in their lives.

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There are twenty-one different orders of mammals. Most of these orders live on land. However, there are two groups that have **adapted** to life in the sea. These two orders are the **pinnipeds** and the **cetaceans**. Pinnipeds are mammals that have flippers instead of feet. Cetaceans, such as whales and dolphins spend their entire lives in water.

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Marine mammals **evolved** from land mammals millions of years ago. Marine mammals have all of the same major body parts of land mammals. All mammals have lungs for breathing, and muscles and bones for moving. The biggest difference between the two is their environments.

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Living in the ocean is very different from living on land. It is more difficult to see under water than on land and the deeper you go, the darker it gets. Most marine mammals use their sense of hearing much more than sight. Since sound moves faster in water than in air marine mammals use sound and hearing to communicate under water. Also the sense of smell is used much less in marine mammals than in land mammals.

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Unlike land animals, a marine mammal has water all around its body. The watery surroundings support the bodies of marine animals on all sides and this has allowed marine mammals to grow to enormous sizes. Some marine mammals are many times larger than even the largest dinosaurs!

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Another important difference is body shape. Marine mammals are much more sleek, which allows them to swim better in water. The outer layer is usually fur or hair in land mammals. On marine mammals the outer covering is a smooth layer of skin. Smooth skin helps cut down on **friction**.

<p>One of the most unusual features of a cetacean is the location of its nose. The nose of this marine mammal is a blowhole on top of its head. The blowhole leads to the lungs and unlike the nose of land animals, is completely separate from the mouth.</p>	30
<p>Marine mammals become adults between the ages of five and sixteen years. Adult mammals can make babies. Adult females have babies every few years. In order to have babies, adult male and female marine mammals mate. A baby then grows inside a mother's body. The female usually gives birth to one baby at a time since it is difficult to care for more than one baby at a time.</p>	35
<p>A newborn whale or dolphin will get helped to the surface of the ocean to take its first breath. Most marine mammals are active soon after they are born. For most marine mammals, the mother feeds and protects her young without any help from the father. Marine mammals' babies nurse on their mothers' milk, which is high in fat and rich in vitamins. Mothers may nurse their young for more than six months. This mother's milk helps the baby to grow and become strong.</p>	40
<p>The mother protects her young from predators and teaches her young how to swim and hunt. Many seals however, do not teach their young these skills. They learn how to survive on their own. When young mammals are not learning with their mothers, they play often. Young marine mammals will swim with their mothers for several months until they are strong enough to swim alone.</p>	45

Using the previous passage, “All about Marine Mammals,” complete the following questions.

1. Read this sentence from the passage.

“These creatures lay **dormant** in the winter months.”

(Line 4)

Another word for “dormant” is

- a. hiding
- b. watchful
- c. restless
- d. sleeping

2. Read this sentence from the story.

“They learn how to survive on their own.”

(Line 43)

The words “They” and “their” are pronouns for

- a. marine mammals
- b. seals
- c. whales
- d. dolphins

3. Why do marine mammals rely more on sound rather than sight?

- a. They generally have poor eye sight.
- b. They hear much better than other mammals.
- c. It is more difficult to see under water.
- d. It is easier to see under water.

4. Which word has the same “ou” sound as “sound”?

- a. tough
- b. would
- c. count
- d. course

5. Read these sentences from the passage.

“Most of these orders live on land. However, there are two groups that have **adapted** to life in the sea.”

What is another word for “adapted”?

6. Using information from the passage, describe three **characteristics** of mammals.

7. Explain why the marine mammal young must swim with their mothers for so many months.

Use your own ideas and ideas from the passage in your answer.

8. Using information from the passage, tell about what happens at each stage of development for a marine mammal.

First Breath	Early Care	On their Own

9. Read the following sentences.

- 1 When young mammals are not learning with their mothers, they play often.
- 2 Adult mammals can make babies.
- 3 For most marine mammals, the mother feeds and protects her young without any help from the father.
- 4 Adult females have babies every few years.

Which order do these sentences need to be in, to follow the stages as described in the passage?

- a. 4, 3, 2, 1
- b. 2, 3, 1, 4
- c. 2, 4, 3, 1
- d. 4, 1, 2, 3

Definitions:

Pinniped - a mammal with front and back limbs that look like fins. Pinnipeds have a round head and a round body that gets thinner towards the end. They spend much of their life in the ocean, but raise their young on land. Walruses, sea lions, and seals are kinds of pinnipeds.

Cetacean - a kind of mammal that lives in the water and has front limbs that look like paddles and back limbs that do not show. Whales, porpoises, and dolphins are all cetaceans.

Evolved - having undergone a gradual process of change and development.

Friction - the rubbing of one object or surface against another.

Mate - a marriage partner or close friend.

* The above definitions are from the online dictionary Wordsmyth, on February 13th, 2014.